

106
101

The people of Astor and Gilgit would be surprised if they were told that they were Dards living in Dardistan, and their neighbours of Hunza-Nagar and Yasin would be equally astonished. If consulted, they would probably describe their country as Shina, or the land of the Shina, where Shina is the spoken language. They are an Aryan people, stoutly built, cheery, honest, frugal, and sober. They are devoted to polo, and are fond of dancing. The inhabitants of Astor wear a peculiar head-dress: a bag of woollen cloth, half a yard long, which is rolled up outwards at the edges until it gets to the size to fit comfortably to the head, round which the roll makes a protection from cold or from sun, nearly as good as a turban. Their houses are small, with very small doors, and are usually built out from the mountain side. Warmth is the one consideration. The Astoris have some very peculiar customs. Drew notices that they hold the cow in abhorrence. They will not drink cow's milk, nor will they burn cow-dung, the universal fuel of the East, and in a pure Shin village no one will eat fowls or touch them. They practise inoculation for small-pox, their one epidemic. The people of Astor are Musalmāns, two-thirds being of the Sunni persuasion, and the rest being either Shiahs or Maulais. There is no religious intolerance in Astor.

342

784

751

795

564

162

Drew mentions the following caste divisions: Ronu, Shins, Yashkun, Kremina, and Duma. As regards the Ronu caste, he says that there are a small number of families in Gilgit. Biddulph, in his *Tribes of the Hindu Kooch*, states that it forms 6 per cent. of the Gilgit population, and that it is the most honoured caste of all, ranking next to Mukhpuns or the Rajā caste of Dardistan. The majority of the Astoris belong to the Yashkun caste, and the Shins are few in number, under 3,000. They are more numerous in Gilgit, the total number of Shins, according to the Census, being 7,733. The Shins are regarded with great respect by the Yashkuns and the other castes. The Yashkuns claim the Shins as their forefathers. The Shins give their daughters to Ronus and to Saiyida, but take wives from the Yashkuns. Far away in Central Ladākh, in the Hanu valley, live other Dards of the Buddhist religion. They have retained the Aryan type of the country whence they came and its Shina dialect, but they wear the pigtail and the Ladākhī cap. It is said that, though Buddhist by name, they really worship local spirits and demons. They practise polyandry, but they will not eat with Tibetan Buddhists, and, like the Shins in Dardistan, they hold the cow in abhorrence.

[512]

563

[771]

[595]

[594]

000

In Gilgit, as in Astor, there are few social subdivisions, for